The Philippine Department of Tourism
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on the DOT

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DOT launches Tourist Assistance Call Center

Manila, Philippines - Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco herself made the first call to the first-ever centralized and multi-platform Tourist Assistance Call Center launched on Monday (Oct. 2) at the Department of Tourism (DOT) Central Office in Makati City.

The newest tourism innovation of is in line with the Marcos administration's thrust to revitalize the tourism industry as an engine for economic growth and fulfill one of the objectives of the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023 to 2028 to enhance the overall tourist experience in the Philippines.

According to the tourism chief, the Tourist Assistance Call Center shall serve as the hotline and one-stop shop for local and foreign tourists, made available to provide tourism- and travel-related information and extend assistance if any to untoward incidents that may occur during the tourist visit.

"We are delighted to launch today the Tourist Assistance Call Center that aims to fulfill our President's vision to enhance the overall tourist experience in the country. This is a first for the Department of Tourism where we have consolidated the modes of assistance that can be given to tourists from the national government agencies and regional offices that will then coordinate with our local government units," Secretary Frasco said in a message during the launch.

"One of the strategic approaches of the National Tourism Development Plan approved by President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. is on the aspect of convenience. The convenience of travelers must be the central focus of our efforts and programs," she added, noting that the goal is not just to lure more tourists but to also gain repeat customers.

The Secretary herself was the first client of the call center agent who personally relayed her queries on diving in Mindanao, to which the agent based in Angeles City, Pampanga enthusiastically answered her questions.

A first DOT-led nationwide tourism telecommunication assistance

During the launch, Secretary Frasco emphasized the importance of the project, as the first professional nationwide online and telecommunication assistance center established by the DOT.

There are an initial eight tourist assistance agents fluent in English and Filipino languages who will be working on shifts as well as two quality assurance team members, and two trainers. They are outsourced agents of service provider Universal Access & Systems Solutions (UAS), an IT solutions company. The tourism chief also mentioned plans to expand and "add foreign language-trained agents in time to come".

However, the Secretary noted that the DOT will not limit the number of agents who will be working for the call center, should the need arise.

The agents have also been trained for three months, with extensive knowledge of tourism and travel services, including the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE).

The agents are ready to receive inquiries beginning today, from local and international tourists traveling to and around the country.

The Tourist Assistance Call Center will also cater to tourists from different time zones and will be open 24/7, even on public holidays to ensure uninterrupted service. The operating hours or service levels will be the same for weekends and weekdays.

Call center agents will be taking all kinds of queries as they come, including general tourism inquiries, even those concerning the local level, DOT accreditation guidance, travel assistance, complaint resolution, and emergency assistance, among others.

However, complex queries will be resolved by the concerned unit and followed through by the call center until resolution.

All transactions are recorded in a customer relationship management (CRM) with a ticketing system. General Inquiries are resolved within the call or chat. If the concern is for escalation, this is endorsed to the respective DOT regional office (RO), local government unit (LGU), attached agency, or national government agency (NGA) via email.

"Tourism is one of the strongest pillars of our economy. And therefore, the effort of the Department of Tourism is to ensure that we continue to provide innovative services to the industry that correspond to the demands of our customers and clients. We foresee that by providing this tourist assistance call center, this will increase the tourism experience. This will also assist in providing further livelihood and employment opportunities for those in the tourism value chain," Secretary Frasco also emphasized.

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Boracay, Palawan, Siargao voted among Asia's best by Condé Nast Traveler reader

Makati, Philippines - Three renowned island destinations in the Philippines made it to this year's Condé Nast Traveler (CNT) Top 10 Readers' Choice Awards. Boracay, Palawan, and Siargao placed third, sixth, and tenth, respectively among readers from around the world of the prestigious luxury and lifestyle travel magazine, the Department of Tourism (DOT) announced on Thursday (Oct. 05).

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco announced the news, affirming how the world-renowned islands continue to mesmerize global travelers.

"We welcome the resounding message tourists from around the world say: they Love the Philippines! From the charm of our islands, pristine beaches, crystal-clear waters, vibrant marine life, lush landscapes, rich heritage and culture, and the excellent hospitality of the Filipino people, the Philippine experience is always one that is filled with love and happy travels," she exclaimed.

More than half a million people surveyed

According to CNT, some 600,000 readers who registered to vote took part in the survey conducted online, making the Readers' Choice Awards sought-after by the travel industry and often seen to forecast travel trends.

Taking the third spot in Asia, Boracay garnered a total of 90.74 points, while Palawan got 89.71, and Siargao with 87.37 in readers' votes.

"This achievement reflects the hard work, dedication, and sustainable tourism efforts of our country, from our local communities, national and local government agencies, and stakeholders who have strived tirelessly to preserve and enhance the beauty of these islands," the Tourism Chief added.

Asked how this latest recognition will help position the country, Secretary Frasco said, "The awards inspire us to continue developing and promoting the Philippines as a premier travel destination in Asia and the world."

"Our commitment to sustainable tourism practices has not only captivated the hearts of travelers but has also contributed significantly to the growth of our nation's tourism industry," the Tourism Chief concluded.

Boracay and Palawan are no strangers to this recognition, making an appearance in the list in the previous years.

Last year, Boracay topped the list of islands in Asia, with Palawan ranking eight. ***DOT***

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DOT Chief seeks Senators' support to usher in the "Golden Era" of Philippine tourism

During the public hearing of the Senate Committee on Finance Subcommittee "J" to deliberate on the proposed 2024 budget of the Department of Tourism (DOT) on Tuesday (Oct. 3), Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco reported the resurgence of the Philippine tourism industry as it records Php 344 Billion in foreign visitor receipts in just the first nine months of 2023.

"As of October 3, 2023, I am pleased to report to this Honorable Committee, that the Philippines has received over four (4) million international arrivals into the Philippines, constituting over 84.7% of our target for this year. Thus far, the revenues contributed by tourism to our economy as of September 30, 2023 numbers Php 344 Billion," Secretary Frasco said.

"After the pandemic, as the world opened up to countries opening up to travel and tourism once again, the landscape variably changed, which necessitated taking on a developmental approach towards tourism, as well as a recognition of the necessity for innovation in corresponding to global trends. Our President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos, Jr. has long recognized since the beginning of his administration, the immense potential of tourism as a socio-economic tool for development to provide livelihood and employment opportunities to our fellow Filipinos," the tourism chief added.

Ushering in the Golden Era of Tourism

According to Secretary Frasco, as the DOT ushers in the golden era of tourism under the Marcos Administration, the Department is optimistic about implementing more projects that "would further elevate the quality of Philippine tourism".

Among the DOT's projects in the pipeline include the continuation of tourism roads and infrastructure projects under the Department of Public Works and Highways (DWPH) convergence, enhancement of tourist experience through the Travel Philippines application, development of its Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) operations manual, the establishment of Tourist Emergency Centers and more Tourist Rest Areas, introduction of programs to support the creative industries, and further develop of tourism products such as farm, halal, health and wellness, MICE, pilgrimage and heritage, sports including surfing and golf, tourism, as well as offer tourism scholarships, among others.

While the 2024 National Expenditure Program (NEP) for the DOT which consists of an allocation of Php 2.99 Billion is a substantial decrease of 20% compared to its 2023 GAA which amounted to Php 3.7 Billion, and indicates a lower budget for almost all of the Department's operating units under the Office of the Secretary (OSEC), Secretary Frasco lobbied for the support of the Senators in sustaining the industry's gains.

"The DOT therefore appeals for a reevaluation of the budget, as well as the necessary resources to effectively fulfill its mandate, especially since we all know how crucial the tourism sector is to our economy that employs millions of Filipinos," she said.

In addition, the Secretary reiterated the DOT's commitment to uphold transparency and to utilize its budget for the current year.

"The Department of Tourism is committed to continuing the gains that have been made in this sector under the Marcos Administration by taking a developmental and innovative approach towards tourism development. It is our earnest hope that with the support of this Committee, the honorable Chairperson, and our dear Senators, we would be able to be armed with the appropriate resources that will give us a competitive edge vis-a-vis our ASEAN neighbors," she concluded.

The public hearing concluded with Senate Committee on Finance Subcommittee "J" chaired by Senator Nancy Binay submitting the proposed 2024 NEP of the Department and its attached agencies to the plenary.

Maximizing the Department's limited resources

Among the DOT's recent wins in the aspect of connectivity, Secretary Frasco shared, include the construction of tourism roads and improvement of gateways including air and seaports with NAIA Terminal 2 as pilot, recovery of flight seats and frequencies, launching of the country's first Hop-On Hop-Off (HOHO) Bus Tours, improved connectivity in tourist destinations, and a stronger cruise tourism program, among others.

In enhancing tourist convenience, the Department has so far launched ten Tourist Rest Areas all over the Philippines with more in the pipeline, and recently, the very first centralized and multi-platform Tourist Assistance Call Center. It also continually works with its attached agencies and other national government agencies to introduce policy reforms concerning making processes and transactions more seamless for travelers.

To equalize tourism opportunities across the country, the DOT has carried out efforts that banner Mindanao's readiness to tourism, offered over 21,000 tourism jobs nationwide, increase peace and safety in destinations, as well as uplift regional tourism stakeholders through projects such as the Philippine Experience: Heritage, Culture, and Arts Caravan, among others.

Anchored on the greatly received enhanced tourism campaign "Love the Philippines", the DOT has also embarked on training 100,000 Filipinos on the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE).

Secretary Frasco shared that as of October 3, 2023, the DOT has trained 92,173 individuals on the FBSE.

Senators laud efforts, offer support to DOT programs

As she presided the hearing, Senator Binay, who inquired into the DOT's training initiatives, commended the Department's efforts, particularly its successful breaching of its training targets for the year.

"I really have to commend DOT also kasi way above the target 'yung nareach nila considering 'yung given budget," the Senator said.

Senator Loren Legarda shared a similar sentiment with Senator Binay, and requested for the DOT to furnish the Committee with its complete list of training programs and areas where more support will be needed.

"All these questions are meant to assist because you're correct, we want to increase our tourism arrivals, we have to train the Filipino people, I mean the workers, and generate more jobs in tourism, and to improve also the knowledge, the expertise of our trainers also, so we want to do that," Senator Legarda said.

Meanwhile, Senator Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito, acknowledged Secretary Frasco and the DOT's programs that aim to enhance tourist convenience, particularly on increasing connectivity and infrastructure, as well as the promotions of the country's "hidden treasures" such as Tawi-Tawi, the country's southernmost province, among others. He also commended Secretary Frasco for giving attention to promoting the El Deposito in San Juan City, which is the largest remaining Spanish artifact in the Philippines.

"Be rest assured of our support and I would like to again commend the DOT and your attached agencies for your efforts but again, Madam Chair, it's not, promotion is half of it. 'Yung ibang half is other agencies, again, I reiterate that connectivity is (of) utmost importance, but we have to help in promoting tourism," he said.

Senator Robinhood Padilla lauded the DOT's achievement of surpassing four million visitor arrivals for the year, as shared by Secretary Frasco before the Committee.

"Wow, congratulations ma'am (Secretary Frasco). Napakalaking bagay po nito sapagkat alam niyo po 'yung mga kapitbahay natin dito sa Southeast Asia, lahat po sila ang puhunan nila ay nasa turismo," Senator Padilla said, as he offered his suggestions on how the Tourism Department can further position the Philippines a tourism destination, further noting the potential of film tourism in the country.

Meanwhile, Senator Christopher "Bong" Go also manifested his support for the DOT's budget via a text message read by Senator Binay.

With Secretary Frasco are DOT Undersecretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Central Office and Regional Directors, as well as heads of DOT attached agencies the Intramuros Administration (IA), National Parks Development Committee (NPDC), Nayong Pilipino Foundation (NPF), Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA), Philippine Commission on Sports SCUBA Diving (PCSSD), Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), and the Tourism Promotions Board Philippines (TPB). ***DOT***

TIEZA Philippine Tourism Investment Summit 2023: Uniting Public and Private Sectors to Fuel Tourism Growth

Taguig City, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) through the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) in partnership with the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) hosted the first Philippine Tourism Investment Summit at the Shangri-La Hotel in BGC on October 11, 2023.

With a comprehensive vision, the Philippine Tourism Investment Summit 2023 was orchestrated to bring together key public and private stakeholders in the tourism industry. This collaborative effort aims to amplify the awareness on the immense investment opportunities within TIEZA assets and Tourism Enterprise Zones (TEZs), and encourage potential investors to explore and engage with the Philippine government under the Marcos Administration.

DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, the keynote speaker at the event, noted that the summit served as a platform where both public and private sectors come together to forge essential partnerships that will enhance the nation's tourism infrastructure.

"The purpose of this Philippine Tourism Investment Summit is to interlink and align the vision of both the public and private stakeholders spotlighting opportunities within TIEZA assets and Tourism Enterprise Zones all over the Philippines. This is your invitation to shape the future together with the Philippine government by way of joint venture and other modalities," said Secretary Frasco.

A pivotal aspect of the summit was the presentation of ways for the private sector to engage with the TIEZA, which include: partnering with the agency in the redevelopment of its assets; funneling the private sector's capital and expertise in the Flagship TEZs; and by registering their tourism-related businesses with TIEZA for the availment of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives.

During the summit, the DOT chief presented the general overview of the tourism industry, noting that travel and tourism comprise 7.6% of the Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 valued at US$ 7.7T, employing some 295 million people worldwide which is equivalent to 9% of the global employment population. This figure is projected to expand to a US$ 15.5T industry by 2033 employing some 430 million globally.

In the Philippines, tourism has earned an estimated PHP 1.87T for the country's economy and generated 5.35 million jobs in 2022. With a 6.2% share in the country's GDP for the previous year, the tourism industry had a recovery rate of 67.18% compared to the 2019 numbers.

"President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos, Jr. emphasized that tourism is a priority. To quote our President, this prioritization goes deeper than the mere provision of economic opportunities and job generation it stems from the deep love that you, me, and all of us have for the Philippines, indeed this is not merely about economic rejuvenation but also an expression of our sheer love for our nation," Secretary Frasco said in her speech.

Meanwhile, TIEZA Chief Operating Officer (COO) Mark Lapid in his opening remarks, emphasized the significance of the summit as it showcases the investment opportunities in TIEZA Assets and TEZs, which propels the tourism industry to greater heights.

"Aligned with the 2023-2028 National Tourism Development Plan, TIEZA is continuously exerting efforts to make the Philippines not only a prime tourist destination anchored on the Filipino identity but also a prime tourism investment destination within the framework of sustainable development", enthused COO Lapid.

For her part, Atty. Benedicta Du-Baladad, Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) President said, *"It is so much into objectives that MAP decided to undertake to be part of this investment forum series to complement the efforts to bring in foreign direct investments, and is an initiative to poster a thriving investment ecosystem by hoisting the value chain support sectors aligned with the government's priority areas. And through these efforts, we are also able to seamlessly integrate our MSMEs into the expansive ecosystem of international investors and moving industries."*

The MAP, which co-sponsored the event, added a crucial private sector perspective on tourism investment, as their involvement exemplifies the commitment of the private sector to work hand in hand with the government in realizing the full potential of the tourism sector.

Towards the end of her message, Secretary Frasco said, *"Love the Philippines goes beyond a mere slogan, it is a heartfelt invitation to everyone, to every prospective investor here today, consider this: The Philippines isn't simply offering an investment opportunity— it's extending an invitation to be part of a legacy. A legacy marked by growth, sustainable development, and mutual success."*

Speakers of the event include distinguished private sector leaders such as Chair and President of Enchanted Kingdom Cesar Mario Mamon, President & CEO of Air Asia Philippines Ricardo Isla, Cebu Pacific Chief Strategy Officer Alex Reyes, and Philippine Airlines (PAL) President & CEO Captain Stanley Kua Ng. **DOT**

Filipino hospitality excellence soars with DOT surpassing 100k target

Manila, Philippines - Two months before year-end, the Department of Tourism (DOT) breached its target of training 100,000 frontline tourism workers on the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE), Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco announced.

Undertaken by the Office of Industry Manpower Development (OIMD), the FBSE program is one of the centerpiece programs of the Department which aims to perpetuate Filipino hospitality excellence, and is envisioned to enhance and uplift the quality of tourism services in the country. This highlights the 7Ms of Filipino values: Maka-Diyos, Makatao, Maka-Kalikasan, Makabansa, Masayahin, May Bayanihan, and May Pag-asa.

As of October 13, 2023, a total of 100,407 tourism workers, across a variety of sectors such as accommodation, travel and tour, transport, academe, MICE, farm tourism, tour guide and tourist police (TOPCOP).

To recall, the FBSE was conceptualized by the DOT in 2013 with over 13,000 trained since its inception.

It was at the helm of Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco when she set the goal of training 100,000 Filipinos, recognizing the potential of the FBSE program to transform the Philippines into Asia's center for hospitality excellence.

The Filipino brand demonstrates immense love, compassionate care, excellent service, and hard work beyond the call of duty— virtues that further sets the Philippines apart as a tourism destination.

"Surpassing our 100,000 target manifests the commitment of the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to transform the tourism industry by further capacitating our country's greatest asset - the Filipino people. Their unwavering dedication is the driving force that will propel the Philippines into a tourism powerhouse, radiating the love, warmth, and hospitality that define our nation." said Secretary Frasco.

"We are very happy to share that less than a year since the 100,000 goal for FBSE training has been set, we have already hit more than what we aimed for. We thank our stakeholders for rising to the challenge, as well as the trainers, participants, and our partner institutions who have closely collaborated with us on this initiative," she said.

A Culture of Excellence

Eddierose Salamero, Operations Manager of the Urban Boutique Hotel, Boracay completed the training program recently, he said "The Filipino Brand of Service Excellence training greatly empowers those of us in the hospitality sector to embody the very best of Filipino culture and to treat every guest with a heart. We are thankful to DOT Secretary Christina Frasco for pursuing the goal of training 100,000 individuals and for promoting Filipino excellence in the tourism industry."

Meanwhile, Orly Ballesteros, a MICE professional and FBSE Level 1 Regional Trainer for DOT NCR said, *"I am elated to be part of an undertaking to achieve 100,000 graduates of FBSE. Our brand promise of showing the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence to the world will be made possible because of these stakeholders. I hope that sooner than later this culture of excellence will become the norm rather than an exception."*

Mabuhay Gesture

Additionally, part of the sustained efforts to the enhancing the DOT's FBSE initiative is the institutionalization of the use of "Mabuhay" and "Salamat" gestures through ordinances. At present, it was adopted by the provinces of Surigao Del Norte, Surigao Del Sur, Oriental Mindoro, Capiz, and the municipalities of Malay, Aklan; Bayabas, Surigao Del Sur; Loreto, Dinagat Islands; and Santa Barbara, Iloilo.

Several institutions from the sectors of travel and tours, accommodation, transport, food and beverage, meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE), as well as the government, have also advocated the FBSE culture. These included the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA), Megaworld Corporation, Enchanted Kingdom, Best Western Plus, Hilton Hotels and Resorts as well as industry partners Fastcat, Aguila Auto Glass, SM Retail, SMC Infrastructure Tollways, Jollibee, AllDay, Robinsons Malls, FIBA World Cup, and partners from the academe. ***DOT***

Philippines named Asia's Best Cruise Destination 2023 by World Cruise Awards

United Arab Emirates - The Philippines has proudly clinched the title of Asia's Best Cruise Destination 2023 at the prestigious World Cruise Awards. This notable achievement marks the first time the Philippines has received this recognition, building the country's reputation as an emerging powerhouse in the global cruise and tourism sector.

The World Cruise Awards, an annual program that celebrates excellence in the cruise industry, is affiliated with the renowned World Travel Awards. The awards program recognizes outstanding contributions to the cruise industry and is a highly anticipated event for cruise professionals, media, and consumers worldwide.

Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco expressed her gratitude and appreciation for the award noting that "This first time recognition as Asia's Best Cruise Destination 2023 is a big win for Philippine tourism as it reflects a resounding global preference for our island destinations.

"We extend our sincere appreciation to all our tourism stakeholders for their hard work and collaboration. The shared tourism governance between government and the private sector espoused by the Marcos Administration is bearing fruit. We are committed to maintain and enhance the Philippines' standing as an outstanding cruise destination in Asia and the world," the tourism chief added.

Other countries that vied for the award include India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

As of October 16, 2023, The Philippines is projected to have 128 ports of call or cruise calls in 2023 across 33 destinations across the country. These cruise ships are expected to bring in more than 101,000 passengers and some 50,000 in estimated crew.

"The Philippines is world-renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty, pristine beaches, diverse marine life, and warm hospitality. Our archipelago of 7,641 islands offers a wide array of cruise experiences, from exploring picturesque coastlines and coral reefs to immersing in local culture and traditions," enthused the tourism chief.

Among the arriving cruise ships include the Seaborne Encore, Silver Shadow, MSC Poesia, Queen Elizabeth, Norwegian Jewel, Coral Adventure, MS Seven Seas Explorer, MS Star Breeze, Silver Whisper, Oceania Cruises, Aidabella, and the Blue Dream Cruise which has made its maiden voyage to the Philippines this month.

"With Boracay, Palawan, and Siargao having recently garnered Conde Nast Travel's Best Islands in Asia Award, the Philippines' recognition as Asia's Best Cruise Destination complements and reaffirms our status as a must-visit destination for cruise enthusiasts. This prestigious award is not only a testament to the Philippines' allure as a cruise destination but also a validation of the collective dedication of the tourism industry and the Department of Tourism. This augurs well for our strategic objective to equalize tourism development, as we put the spotlight on lesser-known destinations by expanding our cruise tourism portfolio to include new tourism destinations in time to come. We are grateful that the country's potential to offer exceptional cruise experiences is now acknowledged on a global scale," added the Secretary. **DOT**

Philippine Experience Bicol: Sorsogon's Kasanggayahan Festival

The Department of Tourism (DOT) last October. 8 brought guests of the Philippine Experience Program (PEP) to Sorsogon to witness the grand opening of the Kasanggayahan Festival.

Delivering her keynote address before guests at the Sorsogon Capitol Gymnasium, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Christina Garcia Frasco shared her excitement in joining Sorsoganons in this momentous occasion.

"The celebration of the Kasanggayahan Festival exemplifies the Filipino identity, so this reflects an unshakable total happiness that is derived from a strong sense of community, a reverence for faith and family, and a profound gratitude for the blessings of the province's natural bounty and beauty. We are here to celebrate Sorsogon with you," Secretary Frasco enthused.

"Sa simula pa lang po ng administrasyon ng ating Presidente, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr., nasabi na po niya na prioridad ng kanyang administrasyon ang turismo. Dahil kita po niya kung gaano kahalaga 'yung turismo sa ating ekonomiya. Kaya naman po 'yung direktiba niya sa amin sa Department of Tourism is na kailangan talaga na ipaabot natin, iparating natin sa lahat ng sulok ng Pilipinas ang biyaya ng turismo," she added.

In fulfilling the President's directive to spread tourism opportunities across the country's regions, the DOT launched the Philippine Experience Program (PEP), a cultural, heritage, and arts caravan that seeks to introduce tourists, both international and domestic, to the heart and soul of the Filipino. Through festivals such as the Kasanggayahan, food, products of local communities, and immersions with the local communities are part of the experience.

As she thanked the Provincial Government of Sorsogon led by its Governor Edwin 'Boboy' Hamor for extending a warm welcome to the delegates of the PEP Bicol, Secretary Frasco said "We view our local government units as our partners for tourism development. And it is our hope that in mounting the Philippine Experience here in Sorsogon, which will also take us to the province of Albay, that we can reawaken the world to the beauty of Sorsogon and the entire Bicol region, and that we can partner and collaborate in uplifting the standards of tourism for the Philippines."

"Everywhere that I have gone in this beautiful archipelago of ours–nakarating na po tayo sa Ilocos Norte, Tawi-Tawi, pati na rin po syempre, sa Cebu, sa Bohol, Palawan, at Sultan Kudarat, and many other places in our country–I have observed that all of us Filipinos hold one thing in common: we all Love the Philippines. And there are so many reasons to Love the Philippines in our provinces, cities, and municipalities, and it is our hope that by bringing the Philippine Experience to the consciousness of the world, that we can also introduce them to the many reasons to love Sorsogon, to love the Bicol Region," she enthused.

Secretary Frasco likewise extended the DOT's gratitude to Senator Chiz Escudero for his support to the Department's initiatives including Love the Philippines tourism campaign.

Considered as one of the biggest festivals in the Bicol region, the Kasanggayahan Festival brings great pride to Sorsoganons each year.

In October 2019, amid celebrating the Kasanggayahan Festival, the Province of Sorsogon made history and bagged the Guinness World Record for the Largest Filipino Folk Dance Performance, with 7,127 dancers from Sorsogon City and all 14 municipalities of the province performing the Pantomina Sa Tinampo, a traditional Bicolano dance of love and courtship, along the picturesque Rompeolas baywalk and the streets of Magsaysay and Rizal.

Just recently, the Kasanggayahan Festival was also recognized as the Grand Winner of the Best Festival Award at the Association of Tourism Officers of the Philippines (ATOP)-DOT 24th Pearl Awards held in Boracay Island.

Following the program to formally open the month-long festivities, the Provincial Government of Sorsogon delighted DOT officials and delegates of the PEP with a taste of authentic Bicolano food and delicacies.

Also present to welcome the delegates were Vice Governor Krunimar "Jun" Escudero, Jr., 1st District Representative Marie Bernadette Escudero, 2nd District Representative Wowo Fortes, Jr., and provincial and local stakeholders. ***DOT***

DOT's Alternative Livelihood Training Program signals hope and recovery as Oriental Mindoro's tourism industry bounces back after oil spill woes

Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro - Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco led the culmination of the "Bayanihan sa Bukas na may Pag-Asa sa Turismo (BBMT)" Alternative Livelihood Training program on October 23 at the Balai Mindoro Convention Center, which trained over 1,300 oil spill affected tourism workers in the province.

This event, along with the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program, recognized the resilience and unity of the province's tourism workers who were affected by concerns brought about by the oil spill crisis.

Secretary Frasco together with Oriental Mindoro Governor Hurmelito "Bonz" Dolor and Vice Governor Ejay Falcon, led the distribution of certificates to representatives of 31 Community-Based Sustainable Tourism Organizations (CBSTOs) across various cities and municipalities of the province, as a way to honor the organizations' members who have successfully completed the BBMT.

132 Start-Up Kits for Beadwork and Lei Making Training were also distributed to the City of Calapan and the Municipality of San Teodoro.

On the sidelines of the event, the tourism chief also surprised the tour guides of the region by giving out tour guiding kits which include essentials such as a wireless lapel microphone, sunscreen, hat, notebook, ballpen, and tumbler that will aid them in their work.

"Nakita ko po kung gaano kahirap yung nadatnan ninyo dahil sa krisis na dala ng oil spill. And yet, none of the difficulties you have faced have served to faze your strength of spirit. And for me, this ultimately reminds us that despite the challenges, despite the suffering, despite the trials, the strength of spirit of the Filipino people will always prevail," said Secretary Frasco in her speech.

"It is because of the conscious effort of your government here in Oriental Mindoro to build upon the strength of both your hard infrastructure and your soft infrastructure that we in the DOT have the confidence to say that while it has only been a few months since the oil spill, we can very well see already the robust recovery of tourism in Oriental Mindoro," she added.

Earlier this year, the MT Princess Empress oil tanker sank off the coast of Tablas Strait in Balingwan Point, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, causing severe damage to the marine environments in the province and neighboring areas. This also sorely affected the livelihoods of the component cities and municipalities of the province that depend on tourism.

The DOT recognized the urgency of providing immediate assistance during the crisis, thus, the BBMT was conceptualized to give a series of alternative livelihood training programs specifically designed for CBSTOs and tourism workers affected by the oil spill. The training programs sought to equip participants with new skills and open up new avenues for income generation for the workers amid the oil spill crisis. The said training sessions ran from April 24 until June 27.

"'Iyong mga training na ginawa ng DOT, napakalaking tulong nito sa amin. Nagkaroon po kami ng extra income tulad po ng massage," Jasmine Quirubin, President of the Malubay Eco-Tourism Association said, one of the recipients of both the BBMT and TUPAD programs.

The BBMT training series encompassed sessions in Farm Tourism: Urban Farming, Tourism Micro Retail: Beadwork and Lei Making, Food Tourism: Kulinarya Training, Health and Wellness Tourism: Hilot Training, and Basic Haircutting Training.

Extending assistance through TUPAD

Aside from alternative livelihood training programs, the DOT and the DOLE have agreed to extend the labor department's Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/ Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program to the oil spill-affected workers, a community-based package of assistance that provides emergency employment for displaced workers, underemployed, and seasonal workers.

A total of 547 beneficiaries received financial assistance from the TUPAD program amounting to 3,550 pesos each, 154 of whom hail from the Municipality of Gloria and were recognized during the event.

Prior to the event, tourism workers from Calapan City and the municipalities of Roxas, Mansalay, and Naujan already received the financial grants while the municipalities of Pola, Pinamalayan, and Bulalacao are currently implementing the TUPAD Program and expected to have its schedule of payout by early November.

Oriental Mindoro is ready for tourists

A popular destination for snorkeling and diving, Oriental Mindoro is known for its beaches and falls that capture the natural beauty of the province such as the White Beach and Tamaraw Falls in Puerto Galera, as well as the cultural richness present in the different indigenous groups in the province such as the Mangyan.

As of October 18, the province recorded 334,588 tourist arrivals, generating over Php 3.5 Billion in visitor receipts thus far.

The tourism chief invited guests to visit and experience the beautiful province of Oriental Mindoro, which has shown resilience amid the oil-spill crisis it has gone through.

"I invite all our fellow Filipinos and friends from all over the world to visit Oriental Mindoro and to enjoy all the wonderful destinations here as well as all the offerings that they have in terms of their heritage, their culture, their dive sites, 'yong mountainscapes nila ang ganda ganda, pati na rin po 'yong kanilang mga local communities, community-based tourism organizations that have all been trained under the Department of Tourism's alternative skills training program," Secretary Frasco enthused.

The tourism chief also reported that there are two major projects set for Oriental Mindoro which include the construction of a tourist rest area and the putting up of a hyperbaric chamber for the thriving dive destination.

"The best thing now is that they [tourism workers] put not only the knowledge but also the assistance from DOT to practice. They have increased already their income, and the alternative livelihood training given by the DOT and the Department of Labor [and Employment] has produced more graduates, more employment, more income to revitalize the tourism industry," Governor Dolor added, emphasizing the vital role the DOT has played in aiding the oil spill affected tourism workers. ***DOT***

The Philippines joins UNWTO General Assembly as Vice President for East Asia and the Pacific; prestigious global position held again after 24 years

Samarkand, Uzbekistan - It was a historic day for The Philippines as it shared the global stage with tourism powerhouses at the 25th United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) General Assembly on October 18, 2023 (Wednesday) as Vice President for East Asia and the Pacific.

Represented by Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, the Philippines was recently elected Vice President for East Asia and the Pacific of the UNWTO General Assembly, a prestigious global position last held by the country more than two decades ago.

She also proudly led the Philippine delegation to the picturesque Samarkand Congress Center in Uzbekistan, where scores of global tourism leaders and influencers from some 150 countries around the world gathered for the much-awaited general assembly of what is one, if not the most prominent tourism organization in the world.

The UNWTO, of which The Philippines is a full member, is a specialized agency of the United Nations that promotes responsible, sustainable, and universally accessible tourism.

A Prominent Position

In a voting ceremony held recently in Cambodia, Secretary Frasco, as representative of the Philippines, took one of the seven coveted seats in the executive committee of this year's UNWTO General Assembly, to occupy a spot in the panel of 15 that included UNWTO Secretary General, His Excellency Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary of the Assembly and UNWTO Director for Communications Mr. Marcelo Risi, and UNWTO Legal Counsel Alicia Gomez.

Uzbekistan presided the General Assembly as elected president, and was assisted by the Commission Vice Chairs: Algeria and the United Republic of Tanzania for Africa, Argentina and Paraguay for the Americas, the Philippines for East Asia and the Pacific, Hungary for Europe, United Arab Emirates for the Middle East, and Maldives for South Asia, in the assembly that explored opportunities for shaping new policies, effective instruments, and global partnerships to support inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

Measuring Sustainable Tourism

In her intervention on the agenda about current trends of International Tourism, Frasco commended the initiatives in the development of the statistical framework for measuring the sustainability of tourism, highlighting that UNWTO has

chosen the Philippines as one of the countries for its pilot implementation.

"By law, sustainable tourism development forms an integral part of national policy as a tool for socioeconomic development. By practice, our national tourism development plan fosters a tourism industry that is sustainable, resilient, and globally competitive, recognizing the necessity of balancing conservation as well as development as a transformative tool for tourism," said Frasco.

"As a concrete manifestation of our support to the UNWTO's sustainable tourism initiatives, the Philippines, as one of the members of the Committee on Statistics representing the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, respectfully recommends that the UNWTO General Assembly endorse the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST), establishing a global consensus among the community of nations. This shall establish a common ground among our nations to measure data on the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of tourism. We rally behind the UNWTO in strongly recommending the adoption by the General Assembly of this Statistical Framework on Measuring Sustainable Tourism," the tourism chief added.

To recall, the Philippines hosted the UNWTO International Tourism Forum in Cebu, and the 6th International Conference on Tourism Statistics in Manila in June 2017, a gathering of global leaders from over 88 countries that resulted in the "Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism."

Maximizing the opportunity, Frasco pitched to the world tourism arena what awaits guests when they come to visit the Philippines, as she likewise pointed out the imperative need to pursue a sustainability tourism framework.

"Diversity is woven into the very fabric of the Filipino identity. We are a confluence of languages, ethnolinguistic groups, and communities that meet in harmony providing an equally profound Philippine experience," said the tourism chief.

"Megabiodiversity is also another dimension unique to the Philippines. Our 7,641 islands being home to 2/3 of the Earth's biodiversity, with 70 to 80% of the world's plant and animal species found in our islands. In view of the natural bounty and ecological vulnerability of our islands, the Philippines recognizes the primordial importance of adopting a sustainability framework in tourism recovery and development," Frasco added.

As Vice President of the General Assembly, Frasco, representing the Philippines, also led the presentation of the report of the executive council to the General Assembly.

Regional UNWTO Meeting to be held in Cebu in 2024

In June of 2024, the Philippines is set to host the Joint Regional Meetings of the Committee for East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia in Cebu.

Joining Secretary Frasco in representing the Philippines at the 25th UNWTO General Assembly were Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran His Excellency (H.E.) Roberto G. Manalo, and DOT officials Undersecretary Shahlimar Hofer Tamano, OIC-Undersecretary Verna Buensuceso, and Assistant Secretary Rica Bueno. ***DOT***

DOT chief joins high-level UNWTO Global Education Forum as panelist

Samarkand, Uzbekistan - Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco underscored the critical role of the Department in bridging the academe and the industry toward championing tourism education in the Philippines, going beyond its mandate to promote the country as a destination to the world.

The tourism chief shared this as she was invited to join the panel representing the Philippines for the first time in the Global Education Forum, a high-level ministerial discourse on policies to foster innovation and education for current and future generations held on the sidelines of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 25th General Assembly, Thursday (Oct. 19), in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

"The importance of education in tourism in the Philippines cannot be overemphasized, especially since we recognize that the Filipino tourism worker is the best asset of Philippine tourism," the tourism chief began, speaking before a thousand of audiences from over a hundred countries joining the global forum.

She continued by emphasizing how tourism education became key in employing millions of Filipinos in the Philippines whose livelihoods were dependent on the industry.

"Tourism in the Philippines employs over 5.35 million Filipinos accounting for over 11.4 percent of our entire national employment and therefore, the focus of our government has been to ensure that at every level of education– from basic education, technical vocational as well as higher education, there are interventions that would ensure quality tourism education," she said.

"The Philippine government is governed by the Philippine Tourism Human Capital Development Plan which lays down the strategy of convergence among government agencies to ensure that the approach towards tourism education is not only theoretical but also practical. And the role of the Department of Tourism has been to be the bridge between the academe and the industry," she explained, noting that the country's approach to tourism education is in a trifocal approach, through the concerted efforts of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

"What the DOT does is to bridge all of these departments with the Tourism Industry Board Foundation, which is a composite of various associations in the entire tourism value chain composed of tour operators, travel agencies, hotel owners and operators, even restauranteurs and the like, so that the curriculum of every level of tourism education continues to be updated to correspond to global trends and continues to apply the concept of innovation especially in response to the changing needs of the consumer," the tourism chief said.

"Therefore, it has been through this convergence approach to education in collaboration with both the academe as well as the industry, with the Department of Tourism serving as a bridge for these institutions that has led to Philippine tourism being fueled by the excellent Filipino hospitality that our country is known for all over the world," she added.

The high-level Global Education Forum highlighted the vital connection between education and tourism development, which also showcased the current state of education in the tourism sector, emphasizing the importance of investing in skills development and creating inclusive opportunities for all.

Joining Secretary Frasco in the panel were His Excellency Mr. Jordi Torres Falco, Minister of Tourism and Industry of Andorra; Dr. Nasser Ali Qaedi, Chief Executive Officer of Bahrain Tourism and Exhibition Authority; Her Excellency Ms. Anayansy Rodriguez, Minister of Tourism of Guatemala; and His Excellency Mr. Rodney Sikumba, Cabinet Minister of Tourism and Arts of the Republic of Zambia.

The panel was moderated by Juan Jose Guemes, Chairman of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Center and Vice President of Economic Affairs of IE University. ***DOT***

BBMG Eastern Visayas Launched

The Department of Tourism (DOT) launches the Bisita, Be My Guest (BBMG) Program in Eastern Visayas on Friday (Oct. 13) at the Summit Hotel in Tacloban City, Leyte.

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco graces the event together with other officials from the DOT and the Tourism Promotions Board Philippines, as well as representatives from the national government, local government units, and tourism stakeholders from the private sector, schools, and tourism associations.

This marks the flagship program's fourth regional launch, following successful launches in SOCCKSKARGEN and in Zamboanga Peninsula last May, and in Western Visayas last June.

The BBMG was also launched in Metro Manila in December of last year and in international locations such as in Tokyo, Japan, in Berlin, Germany, and in the United States of America this year.

Tourism Secretary proudly highlighted the program, stating that it represents a significant step forward in showcasing the breathtaking beauty of the Philippines, with a special focus on Eastern Visayas this time around.

"We have already taken this program all over the world in international launches and various cities in the world, as well as in regional launches all over the Philippines, and we found it appropriate to launch as well here in Eastern Visayas, knowing that Eastern Visayas is home of one of the most megabiodiverse provinces, as well as a wealth of history, heritage, gastronomic delights, and witness to the many important events that have shaped our nation's history," the tourism chief enthused.

Eastern Visayas, monikered as the "Gateway to the Golden East", boasts of its signature tourist attractions such as the MacArthur Landing Memorial National Park in Leyte, the idyllic Kalanggaman Islands, the famous San Juanico Bridge, Sohoton Caves in Samar, as well as an array of heritage sites and farm tourism sites in the region, among others.

Recognizing the vital role they play in Philippine tourism, the Secretary has been gifting tour guiding kits to tour guides across the country as a way to thank them for their hard work and passion in conveying the love, rich history, and culture of the Philippines to visitors who come to its shores.

The said kits include essentials such as a wireless lapel microphone, sunscreen, hat, notebook, ballpen, and tumbler that will aid them in their work.

Four Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE) trainers from the region were also given tokens of appreciation for instilling Filipino values in the country's tourism frontliners and passionately training them to give visitors a taste of the excellent service and the unparalleled warmth and hospitality of the Filipinos.

The FBSE trainers were Master Trainer Jerick Florano, Antonio Cinco Jr., Emily Jill Nival, and Cyril Jose Ignacio.

As of October 12, the DOT has trained 98,268 tourism workers nationwide, getting closer to its goal of training a hundred thousand Filipino tourism workers this year.

In her welcome remarks, Department of Tourism (DOT) Eastern Visayas Regional Director Karina Tiopes emphasized the significance of the BBMG program in harnessing the strength of overseas Filipinos as tourism ambassadors, encouraging them to convince their friends, relatives, and workmates to come and experience the beauty of the Philippines.

"Not only does it [BBMG prizes] always sound exciting but indeed these are fitting rewards for our fellow Filipinos working and living abroad who are now our tourism ambassadors, helping all of us convince and influence their friends and workmates to come, visit, experience, and most importantly, fall in love with the Philippines," she said.

A collaborative effort between the DOT, the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), and the Tourism Promotions Board Philippines (TPB), the BBMG Program is an incentivized promotional campaign that offers Filipinos, particularly Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and Overseas Filipinos, the opportunity to earn raffle tickets when they invite foreigners to visit the Philippines. These raffle tickets give them a chance to win special prizes, making it an exciting and rewarding initiative. ***DOT***

DOT bags two Best video accolades at UNWTO competition

Samarkand, Uzbekistan - Two tourism videos of The Philippines produced by the Department of Tourism (DOT) received special citations at the prestigious United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Video Competition 2023 as part of the activities of the organization's General Assembly held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, recently.

Produced by the DOT-Office of Public Affairs and Advocacy, The Philippines secured the winning stories GINTO: Tourism Heroes of Palawan for the category on Decade of Action which looks for notable examples of how UNWTO Member States are linking their promotional videos to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with references to the 17 Global Goals (SDGs).

Meanwhile, GINTO: Tourism Hero of Zamboanga City garnered acclaim for the Exceptional Stories of Sustainable Tourism category which shows remarkable examples of the human face of tourism and embodying the positive social impact the sector can have through generating opportunities for all.

Directed and edited by Christian Lim, with the assistance of Denison Manuel, and written by Hanah Tabios and Ina Loyola, Tourism Heroes is a feature series covering the facets of the Philippines as a destination while championing, at the same time, its best asset—the Filipino frontline workers and their inspiring stories in the field.

Specially produced for the Department's 50th anniversary, the stories feature tourism frontline workers who have completed the Department's Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE) Training program– a flagship program of the DOT.

It gives us pride and honor that The Philippines won both awards for two categories of this prestigious gathering of nations from across the globe. While we celebrate this win, we likewise emphasize how important it is to honor and prioritize our tourism frontline workers in all the undertakings of the industry. As our President himself said: The Filipino is our country's greatest asset," Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco said.

GINTO: Tourism Hero of Zamboanga City as the UNWTO 2023 winner for Exceptional Story

The Tourism Hero of Zamboanga City captured the life of DOT-accredited Mindanaoan tour guide Errold Bayona and the paddlers of the Yellow Boat Project at the famed Sta. Cruz Island and how they promoted Mindanao as a safe destination for all amid misconceptions about the island.

The story highlighted both the struggles and triumphs of tourism workers in Mindanao, where Bayona was born and raised. He delved into how misconceptions about the southernmost region of the country make it hard to market the destination despite its beauty and grandeur.

But Bayona, a household name in the tour guiding industry, narrated how by undergoing the Department's training programs, he improved his capabilities as a tour guide and ended up contributing to the communities dependent on tourism as the main source of livelihood as he continued to bring tourists to the island.

"On the 50th founding anniversary of the Philippine Department of Tourism, we honor and take pride in our inspiring Filipino tourism workers like Errold, and recognize their efforts in promoting tourism that is inclusive and sustainable helping the local communities and everyone dependent on the industry," cites the presentation produced by the DOT realized with the help of the DOT-Zamboanga City regional office.

According to Secretary Frasco, the story of Bayona reflects the DOT's push to promote Mindanao to the world.

"Through this video, we share to the rest of the world the readiness of Mindanao for tourism, not only those parts that have already opened up to tourists, but more importantly, those that are yet to be discovered," Secretary Frasco enthused.

GINTO: Tourism Hero of Palawan as the UNWTO 2023 winner for Decade of Action

The Tourism Heroes of Palawan episode, meanwhile, featured the deaf and mute workers of Ka Inato restaurant in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, and how its owner, Eric John Yayen, has empowered persons with disabilities (PWD) by giving them training and employment opportunities like other regular workers.

Yayen saw the opportunity to help the deaf and mute community in 2013 when he learned that Palawan has one of the highest numbers of hearing-impaired individuals when they conducted a hearing screening during his term in the Rotary Club of Puerto Princesa.

He then collaborated with the DOT-MIMAROPA regional office to train workers on FBSE for deaf tourism workers in Palawan after employing PWDs as food servers and kitchen staff since the establishment of his restaurant.

"Jhaynee and Alvin are just two of the many persons with disabilities working for the Philippine tourism industry, trained by the Department of Tourism. They are part of the workforce that continues to champion the heart and soul of The Philippines. On the 50th founding anniversary of the Philippine Department of Tourism, we honor and take pride of our outstanding Filipino tourism workers as we aim to reduce societal inequalities, leaving no one behind in this industry," cites the video presentation produced in partnership with the Department's MIMAROPA regional office.

The full list of 2023 winners were:

Decade of Action:

- Africa: The Gambia- Welcome to Gambia
- Americas: Panamá - Panamá vive por más
- Asia and the Pacific: Philippines - Tourism Heroes of Palawan
- Europe: Georgia - Stumari
- Middle East: Oman - Experience Oman

Exceptional Stories:

- Africa: Kenya - Magical Kenya
- Americas: Panama - Panamá vive por más
- Asia and the Pacific: Philippines - Tourism Hero of Zamboanga City
- Europe: Switzerland - My Swisstainable Journey - Ivano Künzli
- Middle East: Egypt – Visit Esna **DOT**

Surf's Up! The 27th Siargao International Surfing Cup

The Department of Tourism (DOT) turned over a P1.5 million funding support to the local government of General Luna in Surigao Del Norte to support its hosting of the highly-anticipated 27th Siargao International Surfing Cup.

The check was handed over by DOT Undersecretary Shahlimar Hofer Tamano, who represented Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, and received by General Luna Mayor Sol Matugas. They were joined by DOT-CARAGA Regional Director Ivonnie Dumadag and DOT Dir. Judilyn Quiachon.

In a message by the tourism chief delivered by Undersecretary Tamano, he emphasized how the Department has been very supportive of the tourism-related initiatives for the country's surfing capital.

"The DOT, through the years, has given its full support to this annual surfing competition which has gained Siargao Island international recognition over the years, including being named one of the top surfing destinations in the world. We are grateful to each of you, as you are one with us in making the Philippines a tourism powerhouse not only in Asia as envisioned by President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. and Secretary Christina Garcia Flasco," he said.

"The Siargao International Surfing Cup is a reminder of how sustainable tourism can be a driving force for positive change. It is a showcase of how communities can thrive through eco-conscious practices, responsible tourism, and a commitment to preserving the very environment that draws visitors here in the first place," he said.

"On behalf of Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, we congratulate the organizers led by Mayor Sol Matugas and 1st District of Surigao del Norte Congressman Bingo Matugas, of this international event, Siargao Intl Surfing Cup, which is on its 27th year. This is a testament to the resilience of a community in its drive to promote the destination as well as the sport, which has given so much back to the locals," the official said.

Siargao-born surfing champs Susan Escanilla and Noah Arkfeld delivered the surfboard before hundreds of crowd in Siargao Island, formally opening the highly-anticipated match through the ceremonial breaking of surfboard last October 25.

The breaking of the board has been a tradition in all surfing competitions which demonstrates the power of the waves of Siargao to pay tribute to the natural force that can really break surfboards at times. It is also an expression of gratitude for the celebration. ***DOT***

Cinematic Milestone: Groundbreaking of the PHL tourism, film and culture hub

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco joins Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) Chairman Tirso S. Cruz III, TIEZA - Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority COO Mark Lapid, Intramuros Administration (IA) Administrator Atty. Joan Padilla, Pangasinan Representative and Chairman of the Special Committee of Creative Industry and Performing Arts Christopher Vera Perez de Venecia, and Manila Vice Mayor John Marvin "Yul Servo" C. Nieto in the time capsule-laying ceremony at the Baluarte de San Diego on Thursday (Oct. 26).

The construction of the said building will officially commence following the signing of the 22-year agreement between the DOT and its infrastructure arm, TIEZA, and the FDCP last September.

Anticipated completion of the Philippine Film Heritage Building is in the last quarter of 2024.

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco emphasized the significance of film tourism and the construction of the Philippine Film Heritage Building during its Groundbreaking Ceremony on Thursday (Oct. 26) at the historic grounds of Baluarte de San Diego of Intramuros, Manila.

The Tourism Chief announced the DOT's prioritization of Film Tourism as a way to highlight a component of the Filipino identity, hence, its inclusion in the National Tourism Development Plan under the Marcos Administration. According to Frasco, the heritage building initiative will preserve Filipino cinematic excellence and cultural identity while using the power of cinema as a strong voice to introduce the nation to the world.

"Today, on the hallowed grounds of Intramuros, where the walls have witnessed the glorious history of our nation, we have laid the cornerstone for the Marcos administration's commitment to honor Filipino cinematic excellence and amplify the voice of the creative industry to continue telling the Filipino story to the world with love. For decades, Philippine films have been a window into the life and times of our nation," said Secretary Frasco.

"This film heritage building is a product of fruitful partnership and collaboration as well as a hub that promotes tourism, history, and culture and provides employment opportunities for Filipinos in the creative and tourism sectors," Frasco stressed the importance of the tripartite agreement between DOT, the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), and the TIEZA - Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority.

The Tourism Chief also extended her gratitude to Senator Robinhood Padilla for his invaluable contribution and dedication to bringing this heritage building project to fruition.

Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) Chairman and Chief Operating Officer (CEO) Tirso Cruz III emphasized the monumental undertaking of constructing the Philippine Heritage Building, describing it as a future hub for film enthusiasts, an invaluable source of knowledge for students, and a repository of Philippine cinema's treasures.

With a ground-breaking ceremony on Thursday (Oct. 26) at the historic grounds of Baluarte de San Diego of Intramuros, Manila, he envisioned the building becoming an iconic tourism attraction, not only for local citizens but also a point of discourse for film enthusiasts worldwide.

FDCP Chairman Cruz underlined the building's significance as a lasting legacy that would enhance the cultural experiences of the nation and generations to come, fostering a profound sense of pride in our cultural and national identity.

"The (film heritage) building is not only for FDPC or only for DOT, or TIEZA; it is for the Filipino people, Filipino film-loving people, and to promote the Philippine film industry," Cruz was quoted as saying.

Pangasinan 4th District Representative and Chairman of the Special Committee on Creative Industry and Performing Arts, Christopher Vera Perez de Venecia, expressed his excitement and honor during the groundbreaking ceremony of the Philippine Film Heritage Building on Thursday (Oct. 26).

De Venecia remarked that *"this (groundbreaking) event holds profound significance, not only within the realm of cinema but for our entire nation".*

"With tremendous pride and unwavering enthusiasm, we celebrate this significant stride towards preserving the rich heritage of Philippine cinema, an art form that has captivated our hearts and souls for generations," Congressman De Venecia continued.

The staunch film and arts advocate emphasized that films go beyond entertainment, as they mirror the Filipino culture, depict history, and showcase the creativity and resilience of Philippine society.

"We are here today, laying the foundation not just for a building but for a future where our films will continue to inspire, inform, and entertain generations to come. It's a future where our cinematic heritage remains vibrant and relevant, a testament to the enduring power of storytelling. This marks a new chapter in the history of Philippine cinema, a chapter brimming with excitement, enthusiasm, and boundless possibilities," De Venecia concluded. **DOT**

[TITLE HERE] National Accreditation Standards

Tourism accreditation officers of the Department of Tourism (DOT) from the different regions gather at the Savoy Hotel in Pasay City to present updates of the 2023 National Accommodation Standards (NAS) for rating accommodation establishments (AEs), including hotels, resorts, and apartment hotels in the Philippines.

The DOT, through the Office of Tourism Standards and Regulation (OTSR), is set to implement the new NAS, which introduces a star rating system from one to five stars based on points earned in various categories.

The 2023 NAS specifies seven dimensions to be used as yardstick to assess establishments. These dimensions cover the entire guest experience, from the moment you arrive, to the services provided during your stay, until your departure, ensuring that all aspects of a hotel, resort, or apartment hotel are considered when assigning star ratings.

The dimensions for implementation include: arrival and departure, public areas, bedroom, lounge/living area, kitchen and dining area (exclusive to apartment hotels), bathroom, amenities and services. In addition to these dimensions, several conditions are also considered, such as: Service, Hospitality, Efficiency, Friendliness Requirements; Filipinization; and Technology/Digitization. ***DOT***

[TITLE HERE] Orientation and Training Program for New Accreditation Officers

Newly-appointed Accreditation Officers from various regional offices and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), as well as agents from the recently launched Tourist Assistance Call Center, gathered together at the Berjaya Makati Hotel on Tuesday (Oct. 24) for an orientation and training program designed to provide an overview of the Department of Tourism's (DOT) standards and accreditation processes.

The DOT's Office of Tourism Standards - Standards, Monitoring and Enforcement Division (OTSR-SMED),

annually conducts the said training. Its objective is to ensure that accreditation officers are well-equipped with knowledge and possess an in-depth understanding of the mandate, functions, and operations of OTSR, as well as their roles in the regional offices concerning accreditation. This includes ensuring comprehensive and consistent interpretation of all the standards, the accreditation process, and the policies enforced by the Department.

Assistant Secretary Maria Rica Bueno graced the event and emphasized the critical role that accreditation officers play in enforcing quality standards and guiding tourism enterprises to comprehend and meet the established standards.

"Sa mga mata ninyo nakasalalay, sa pag-iinspect ninyo nakasalalay ang quality standards ng ating mga tourism services and facilities, kasi kayo 'yong nag-eenforce nung standards. So that's why building up the knowledge, the competencies, the skills of our accreditation officers [is very important]," she said in her message, addressing the 18 accreditation officers in training. ***DOT***

Listening Tour with ESL7 in Cebu

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco met with some foreign tourism stakeholders in Cebu City, Thursday (Oct. 12), as part of the continuation of her listening tours, this time, to elicit valuable insights and suggestions from the specific sector to further improve the English as a Second Language (ESL) offering of the country's local tourism industry.

"*Our intention is to listen [and] to understand what are the prevailing challenges that your institutions face and to explore how the government, from the national and regional levels, may be able to present interventions so that the industry can grow even further,*" the tourism chief said in her message.

The Secretary also relayed before the stakeholders composed of Cebu-based South Koreans, Vietnamese, and Filipinos ESL trainers and executives from various education institutions the President's vision for the Philippines as it gears toward post-pandemic recovery.

"*From the beginning of our President's administration, President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. has been very clear in his intention to ensure that the Philippines, which like many countries all over the world, suffered greatly from the pandemic would not just recover what has been lost, but rather to transcend the times, the demand, and the need for recovery,*" she said.

"*Therefore, the effort is not just to continue with the way things have always been done, but to support the programs that are successful, and to try to see how you may be able to address challenges and issues so that the hurdles that may be present that are preventing the full growth of the sector may be improved,*" she added.

Secretary Frasco also stressed the importance of the ESL sector to the Philippine tourism industry.

"*Because we view you as our partners as being part of the family of tourism stakeholders are viewed greatly to our economy. And of course, ESL is not just an English as a second language, but also a tourism endeavor,*" she said.

"*I am hopeful that the exchange that we will have today will lead to an actual implementation of the measures that we may be able to take to fully support their industry,*" she ended.

To note, an Austria-based research market specialist Bonard cited in 2019 that the Philippines is the fifth largest ESL provider in the world.

Currently, the Philippines ESL source markets include South Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Thailand, while emerging markets are Vietnam, Mongolia, and Russia.

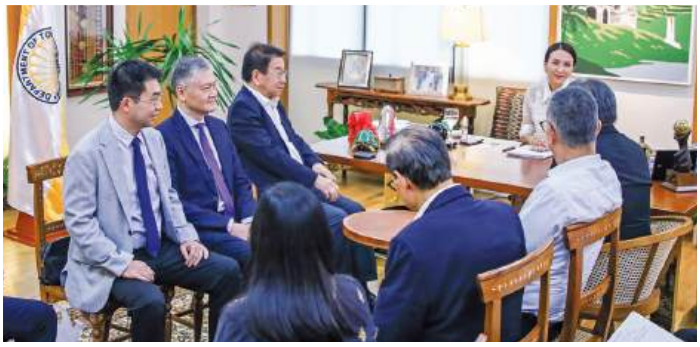
Among the topics discussed included connectivity challenges to source and emerging ESL markets like Vietnam and Mongolia due to the lack of direct flights that would cater students and would-be visitors to and from Cebu; enhancement of the Philippines' ESL portfolio through promotions and marketing by organizing more international conferences, expos, and fairs that would highlight the strong presence of the country as an ESL provider; liberalization and digitalization of visa policies and other processes involving legal documentary requirements that hinders the country from expanding its ESL offering; and translation of ESL clients as tourists and repeat customers.

The education institutions that participated during the listening tour were Executive Village Academy; Cebu Blue Ocean Academy, Inc.; Cella English Academy; Cebu Globalization Academy; Center for Premier International Language Studies, Inc.; Global Language Academy; I. Breeze International Language Center; Lapu-Lapu Cebu International College; Joinus English Language Academe, Inc.; E-Mo Academy; Winning Academy; Cebu International Academy, Inc.; ECC School of Global Communication; English Fella Educational Corporation; and Ethics To Help Others Succeed Corporation.

DOT Undersecretaries Atty. Mae Elaine Bathan and Shahlimar Hofer Tamano as well as DOT Region 7 ESL Program Head Dr. Gelena Asis-Dimpas also came in attendance. ***DOT***

DOT's Carnival and Magic Extravaganza in the Trick or Treat 2023 Celebration

TOURISM RELATED EVENTS



Courtesy Visit from Federation of Filipino Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc.

Turn over of the official replica of Murillo Velarde 1734 Map

Oathtaking of the Boracay MICE Alliance

24th Pearl Awards of the ATOP Association of Tourism Officers of the Philippines

Meeting with Filipino Brand of Service Excellence trainers in Boracay Island

Courtesy meeting with Yllana Marie Aduana, Miss Earth Philippines 2023

SKAL International Tourism Awards 2023

LOVE THE PHILIPPINES
MOONTON
MOONTON GAMES AND DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM
JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE FOR THE M5 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Joint Press Conference for the M5 World Championship

TO OUR NOVEMBER BIRTHDAY CELEBRATORS

1	Jaime Pedroche	13	Rodel Almazan	22	Andrew Bautista
1	Laura Cuizon	13	Rowela Cerbas	22	Virgilio Tamayo
2	Marlon Barrientos	13	Ernestinne Demaclid	22	Joylyn Cauilan
2	Jim Ray Bagsic	14	Marie Grace Lansangan	23	Allen Marie Alejo
2	Angela Jesalva	14	Arianne Faye Balbidades	23	Richard Kevin Santiago
3	Cristian Siaton	14	Jay De Guzman	23	Sylvia Chinayog
3	Khariza Joy Sofia	15	Sherwin Manuel	24	Jhorica Jhane Hernandez
4	Arlene Alipio	15	Clarence Yog	24	Kenneth Lorenz Ruedas
4	Agnes Marie Ocampo	15	Russel Fronda	25	Antonio Miranda Jr.
6	Jonathan Estera	16	Niel Ballesteros	25	Raymond Ledesma
7	Erwin Balane	16	Cezar Jay Sablad	26	Resil Solis
7	Kamille Araneta	17	Rommel Natanauan	26	Virgilio Maguigad
7	Rosemarie Salvacion	17	James Braga	28	Paulo Benito Tubang
8	Armando Labitad Jr.	18	Reynaldo Ching	28	Robert Basco
9	Teodora Laarni Jaraplasan	19	Angela Fagutao	29	Renelyn Villegas-Enriquez
9	Jenny Babe Peta	19	Jennifer Tumlos	29	Harriet Gasatan
10	Maria Dexaivy Gillesania	19	Marchieza Bicong	30	Decius Esmedalla
11	Marissa Victoria Claustro	20	Felicisimo Maximo	30	Bon Jovi Cabreros
12	Edwin Martin	21	Yolanda Cabigao	30	Ernesto Teston